

To: Members, Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources
From: Chief Deputy C. Philip Byers, Rutherford County Sheriff's Office (North Carolina)
Date: July 26, 2005
Re: "Fighting Meth in America's Heartland: Assessing the Impact On Local Law Enforcement and Child Welfare Agencies"

Rutherford County North Carolina is a rural county in western North Carolina comprised of 566 square miles and 63,287 residents. Rutherford County has historically relied upon a manufacturing based economy with textile and furniture industries being two of the largest employers. We have lost most textile jobs during the past five years and recently lost the majority of furniture industry jobs. Unemployment rates for Rutherford County continue to loom between 8 and 10 percent, far above the national average. Rutherford County and her citizens will recover from the loss of manufacturing jobs and with continued leadership, the economic situation will improve and Rutherford County will return to its full economic potential. This will happen if and only if we can curtail the present methamphetamine epidemic that we are currently facing.

Methamphetamine addicts and "cooks" are driving some of Rutherford County's most costly social problems, including domestic violence, child abuse, mental illness, homelessness and the spread of hepatitis and AIDS. Rutherford County continues to struggle with the social and economic setbacks caused directly by methamphetamine addicts and its manufacturers. The North Carolina State Bureau reports the following responses to meth labs in Rutherford County as follows:

2003	34 Lab Responses
2004	43 Lab Responses
2005	25 Lab Responses (As of June 30, 2005)

2003	5 Children Affected as a result of Meth Labs
2004	24 Children Affected
2005	22 Children Affected (As of June 30, 2005)

In 2004, in North Carolina alone, 124 children were removed from homes where methamphetamine labs were in operation. Twenty-four of the children were residents of Rutherford County. This year (2005) has already seen 22 Rutherford County children removed from homes where meth labs were in operation. Many of the children removed from meth labs are abused and neglected and will suffer emotional consequences for the remainder of their lives. The number of children present at methamphetamine labs is expected to continue to increase at an even higher rate. As the number of children present at methamphetamine laboratories increases, more will suffer the physical and psychological effects associated with the exposure to dangerous chemicals, and the number of related abuse and neglect cases will increase. Without a

doubt, the most innocent victims of the meth epidemic are the children who are exposed to labs. Chemicals contamination from meth labs permeates every room of a home thus leaving children exposed to meth chemicals that can cause headaches, nausea, dizziness and even damages to the brain, liver, spleen, kidneys and the immune system. In 2004, over 2700 children were found in methamphetamine labs seized by law enforcement officials nationwide. Children were present in 34% of the total lab seizures in the United States.

The North Carolina General Assembly, Governor and Attorney General are working in conjunction with local and state law enforcement to combat the ills of methamphetamine production and addiction. In December 2004, the criminal penalty for manufacturing methamphetamine was increased from a Class H and I felony to a Class C felony. This guarantees prison time for anyone found guilty of manufacturing methamphetamine. The General Assembly is further working to pass the "Methamphetamine Lab Prevention Act." If approved, this act would limit the sell of pseudoephedrine allowing the product to be sold without a prescription only by a registered pharmacist. The purchaser of pseudoephedrine would be required to present the pharmacist with photo identification and would be required to be 18 years of age. The name and address obtained from the identification would be entered in the record of disposition to consumers. Pseudoephedrine purchases would be limited to no more than nine grams of any mixture of the product, or preparation containing the controlled substance within a 30-day period. This law, if passed, would benefit the law enforcement community but it alone is not enough. Restricting the sell of pseudoephedrine should be in all fifty states. Rutherford County is contiguous to South Carolina thus presenting only a short drive for Rutherford County meth cooks to obtain pseudoephedrine.

Rutherford County will continue to face economic setbacks as a result of methamphetamine addiction. The Rutherford County Sheriff's Office recently transferred two vacant positions to the narcotics division and obtained one new position through local funding. This expansion was due solely to the demand being placed on our office by increased meth labs and methamphetamine addiction. Additional funds will be necessary to pay over-time to officers working methamphetamine cases. The meth epidemic has caused a tremendous burden on the local law enforcement budget and without state and federal assistance; the monies will not be available. We have to this date been an area of local meth cooks making and selling the product. We have begun to seize Ice from Mexico and from "Super labs" throughout the United States. Ice trafficking will continue to grow in Rutherford County, resulting in additional problems and abuses associated with meth addiction. We must place tougher restrictions on the Mexican border or "Ice" will continue to pour into the United States and Rutherford County will begin to experience an additional plague.

Social Services have also found themselves in budget shortfalls due to meth labs. The Rutherford County Social Services is currently in need of foster parents to accommodate the ever increasing number of children being removed from homes where meth labs are present. Social workers are constantly called to assist law enforcement when children are discovered to be living in meth labs. The department is also working to investigate and deal with child abuse and neglect cases as a result of meth addiction.

Local Mental Health agencies are working to develop a successful treatment program for methamphetamine addicts. Current meth addicts have a recovery rate of less than 10 percent. Mental Health resources will continue to deplete until a successful treatment program is developed to treat the long term effects of meth addiction. Medicaid cost as well as health care cost will continue to rise with the physical and mental damage that is resulting from meth use. The future health care cost for meth users will be astronomical. Most if not all meth addicts are uninsured thus placing the cost back on Medicaid and the local governments. Rutherford County experienced a \$700,000 increase in Medicaid in 2004-05. We can expect continued budget breaking results due to the epidemic that we are currently facing.

The future of meth epidemic in Rutherford County, North Carolina is uncertain. We are currently faced with local meth cooks producing their product at the risk of themselves, the community and the environment. For every pound of meth produced, eight to ten pounds of toxic waste will be produced. The environment will pay the price as most of our cooks dump the waste in wooded areas, thus causing potential water contamination. The children will continue to suffer as increased numbers are removed from homes involved in meth production. The long term physical and psychological damages to children will be extremely severe. State and local governments will be faced with ever increasing budget shortfalls as a result of meth abuse and meth addiction.

The facts are staggering and the differences from one county or state to another are minimal. All local Law Enforcement, Social Service, Mental Health, Health Care agencies, Environmental agencies and Schools will suffer severe consequences as a result of methamphetamine abuse and addiction. We must work together to fight this epidemic and hopefully reduce the negative influence that it currently has on our nation.

Recommendations:

- 1) Restrict the sell of pseudoephedrine products nationally
- 2) Tighten the Mexican border to help prevent meth trafficking from Mexico
- 3) Address the pseudoephedrine black market (Canada)
- 4) Longer prison sentences for meth traffickers and meth producers and anyone who involves children in the trade or allows children to reside in a home used for meth production
- 5) Funding for "Interstate Drug Interdiction Teams"
- 6) Continue to prosecute meth manufacturers in the Federal Court System (Longer sentences)
- 7) Work with mental health care providers to develop a better recovery and treatment plan

This information is based on my experience dealing with meth labs and the struggles that I have witnessed. I hope a small portion of this information will help to develop a better system of fighting what continues to burden our local governments in Western North Carolina. I thank you for your time and will be happy to address any questions or comments.